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PLATO AS A WRITER OF IMAGINARY CONVERSATIONS

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To the student of literature, the term "Imaginary Conversations," as applied to dialogue writing, suggests the work of Walter Savage Landor, and of no other writer. This is partly due to the fact that Landor himself was firm in the opinion—and frank in the expression of it—that he had originated a new form of writing, in his imaginary conversations, as much differentiated from the ordinary dialogue as *vers libre* is differentiated from the heroic couplet. His admirers, as enthusiastic in their adoration as they are limited in their number, have devotedly fostered this impression until it requires no small amount of critical daring to affirm that Landor was not the creator of a literary form but rather the perfecter of an old, old type of dialogue, a type used to advantage by Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Lucian, Fenelon, Bishop Hurd, "Christopher North," and many others.

Such an assertion is the result of a comparison of Landor's work with other dialogue writing. It is admitted that Landor has named the form, by virtue of his position as master in the use of it, but a definition of imaginary conversations based upon his own dialogues covers many others which have never before been so termed. Dialogues in which the speakers are real but the conversation is fictitious are "imaginary conversations." A more restrictive definition would exclude writings which Landor himself has so labeled. Granting Landor's supremacy as an "imaginary conversationalist," it is the purpose of this study to show to what degree Plato also merits distinction in the use of the form.

The literature of the Greeks and Romans is crowded with dialogues of every kind, so that it is not to be wondered at that many can be found which fulfil the requirements of the imaginary conversation. Antiquity, however, offers no writer who, like Walter Savage Landor, composed imaginary conversations from purely artistic motives; hence it would be a little unfair to emphasize his superiority in the use of this form of literature over writers

who employed it as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. To pronounce Plato's wonderful *Phaedo* and *Symposium* and *Republic* inferior to Landor's *Dialogues of the Greeks and Romans*, simply because the former are narrated dialogues, would seem at first sight a grave injustice as well as an indication of a decided lack of literary discrimination. It would be all this and more if the comparison were extended to the contents and significance of the two groups, but this is a study of a certain literary form and if in the study unusual estimates such as the one stated above are introduced, it must be kept in mind that they are made with regard to relatively minor factors, more important considerations being sometimes deliberately overlooked for the scientific purpose of examining the use of this particular literary form.

It is sufficient proof of the great possibilities of the imaginary conversation that Plato should have employed it with more or less modifications in all his prose writings. There is room for disagreement concerning the classification of the Platonic dialogues as "imaginary conversations," but there need be no hesitation about attributing to Plato the impulse which led to the ultimate perfection of the form.¹ Ironically enough, Landor himself, angry as he would have become had the fact been called to his attention, owed much to this Greek whom he so strangely misjudged. Landor learned from Plato

many strokes of the craft of dialogue—the cunning overture, the power of keeping characters distinct, and of interveining an abstract discussion with beautiful or lively human touches, the use of allegory or idyll by way of interlude. For all this Landor must surely have studied the master to whom he is unfair.²

Plato's general purpose in writing his Socratic dialogues may be briefly stated as the desire to present in clear undogmatic fashion the philosophy of his teacher and the ideas which he himself had derived from this philosophy. A writer with less dramatic

¹ It is unnecessary, here, to trace the origin of the imaginary conversation back to the lost mimes of earlier times. A description of these writings and of Plato's indebtedness to them is to be found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, VIII, "Dialogue," and in *Der Dialog, Ein Literaturhistorischer Versuch*, von Rudolf Hirzel, I (Leipzig, 1895), 20 ff.

² Oliver Elton, *A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, II (London, 1912), 33.

genius probably would have executed the same purpose in treatise form, but Plato recognized that "thought with personality added to it, is a greater thing than thought alone."¹ Combined with the primary desire of raising men's thoughts to the heights to which his had been elevated by Socrates, other desires led to the writing of these dialogues, such as that of preserving for future generations the complex personality of Socrates, and that of exercising his own dramatic ability and literary sense.² It is the side of his work which is related to these subordinate desires which interests us here, rather than the philosophical side. Most students of Plato have been interested in the conversational phase of the dialogues only in so far as it affected the doctrines inculcated by them.³ In this study, however, the usual attitude will be quite reversed: the philosophical elements will concern us only as they influence the artistic, dramatic quality.

The classification and chronological arrangement of Plato's dialogues have caused endless perplexity to scholars; they still are and doubtless always will be moot questions. The usual

¹ Elizabeth Merrill, *The Dialogue in English Literature* (New York, 1911), p. 3.

² With regard to Plato's purpose in employing this literary form, Mahaffy writes: "We can perceive at least four distinct and important objects attained by adopting it. First, it was the best and most natural way of giving a full and lively history of the life, character, and conversations of his master Socrates, thus producing from another mind and from a different standpoint, a grander, if not so faithful a memoir of the inimitable master. Secondly, it exhibited most clearly the most Socratic and valuable point in Plato's philosophy—the principle of searching after truth, and of resting in this search as a great intellectual end, whether any conclusion was attainable or not; the raising and discussing of all the objections to, and difficulties in, any theory, could in no other way be brought so vividly before the student. Thirdly, it enabled Plato to put forth opinions tentatively, without assuming any responsibility, and of ventilating a new theory before adopting it as a dogma. . . . Lastly, we must not forget that Plato satisfied a keen dramatic and literary instinct by drawing these personal sketches. He gave rein to a satirical and critical spirit also" (Rev. J. P. Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, II, "The Prose Writers" [New York, 1880] 172).

³ Even Jowett with all his keen appreciation of the literary value of Plato's philosophical writings, disparages the passages whose value is solely dramatic. "If," he writes, "we find in these writings, side by side with philosophic inquiry, a considerable space allotted to historical description and dramatic imagery, it is yet easy in some cases to separate these elements, in others to recognize the philosophic kernel which they themselves contain" (*The Dialogues of Plato*, translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett [New York edition], I, xlii).

classification according to subject-matter is a grouping into dialogues of search and dialogues of exposition, typical examples being the *Charmides* and the *Phaedrus*, respectively.¹ The only classification which Plato himself seems to have had in mind was a separation of the general inquiries into knowledge and understanding, from the specific inquiries into physics and ethics. He carefully avoids mingling to any great extent these two types of inquiry in the same dialogue.² Schleiermacher's division of the dialogues into three categories, according to the connected development of philosophical thought, was a convenient one and had the distinction of being the first complete and satisfactory classification upon this basis. Dr. Eduard Zeller, in his *Plato and the Older Academy*, treats the subject of the classification, chronology, and authenticity of the Platonic dialogues with great fulness and care, comparing the classifications of Schleiermacher, Ast, Socher, Stallbaum, Hermann, and more modern investigators of this question.³ He concludes his comparison thus:

. . . . None of the theories we have been considering can be rigidly carried out; the order of Platonic writings cannot depend wholly either on design and calculation to the exclusion of all influences arising from external circumstances and Plato's own development; or on the gradual growth of Plato's mind, to the exclusion of any ulterior plan; or, still less, on particular moods, occasions, and impulses⁴. . . . The main purpose . . . of the great majority of the dialogues, be their outer motive what it may, is the representation and establishment of the Platonic philosophy.⁵

Dr. Zeller then offers his own system of grouping, according to

¹ Mahaffy, *op. cit.*, II, 163-64, note.

² *Harper's Dictionary of Antiquities*, p. 1274.

³ Dr. Eduard Zeller, *Plato and the Older Academy*, pp. 99-109. Translated with the author's sanction from the German, by Sarah Frances Alleyne and Alfred Goodwin, London, 1888. Schleiermacher's classification may be taken to illustrate the general method of all these arrangements, which differ more in the grouping of the dialogues than in the bases of separation. In *Harper's Dictionary*, his three classes are described thus: "In the first he considers that the germs of dialectic and of the doctrine of ideas begin to unfold themselves in all the freshness of youthful inspiration; in the second, those germs develop themselves further by means of dialectic investigations respecting the difference between common and philosophical acquaintance with things, respecting motion and knowledge; in the third they receive their completion by means of an objectively scientific working out, with the separation of ethics and physics."

⁴ Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 119.

this idea. These strictly philosophical arrangements concern our study very little; better adapted to our purposes would be a classification on a literary basis. The nearest approach to such a classification is the system by which the dialogues, as though they were dramas, are grouped into trilogies and tetralogies, according to similarity of theme or treatment.¹

Apparently the dialogues have never been grouped strictly according to structure or method of presenting the ideas, but since such a grouping would be the most consistent with this discussion of their conversational value, there is no reason why it may not be used. They fall naturally into two groups—narrated and direct dialogues. The former begin with a few speeches of direct dialogue, serving to introduce the main conversation, which is related by one of the speakers. The dialogues of this type are the *Charmides*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Euthydemus*, *Republic*, and *Parmenides*. Only a Plato could have employed this unwieldy form of *oratio obliqua* with the success which it attains in the *Symposium*, but even there one feels that it is an error in form, and that the dialogue could be read with more ease had the simpler method been used.² The advantage offered by this method of describing the speakers and the setting of the dialogue, or the incidents which brought it about, probably seemed to Plato to outweigh the inconveniences. Yet the narrative element seriously detracts from the value of the dialogues as imaginary conversations—a species of literature which has as its leading characteristics directness and a sense of reality. The fact that some of the narrated dialogues are more interesting and more spirited than some of those which lack this handicap does not lessen the truth of the criticism but does increase one's admiration of Plato's exceptional dramatic skill.

¹ The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* uses a part literary, part philosophical classification, grouping the dialogues into eight series and explaining the relation in each case.

² *Harper's*, see "Dialogus." Mahaffy writes thus regarding the method of indirect narration: "This prolonged obliqueness of construction, with its crowded infinitives, always appears awkward, not to speak of the dramatic absurdity of making any man repeat from memory a set of speeches or an intricate dialogue. This absurdity is only artistically tolerable where the speaker reports a conversation in which he himself took a leading part as in the case with Socrates in the *Lysis*, *Charmides*, and *Protagoras*."

Another classification might be made on the basis of the relative historical and fictitious quality of the conversations. An imaginary conversation, we have decided, consists in the imagined speech of real people. There are many critics of Plato who would question our right to apply this term to his dialogues, maintaining that Socrates is an idealization, a mere name, not a real person at all, as Plato presents him;¹ there are just as many other critics who would argue that in Plato's dialogues we have the actual, not the imagined, conversation of real people.² But these are the extremes of critical attitude. May we not avoid entering too deeply into the controversy over the historical value of Plato's portrayal of Socrates, by taking a neutral position, admitting that here we have an actual incident, a remembered speech, or a genuinely noted-down bit of conversation, but there again we have a fancied happening, a speech based upon supposition and general impression, or a conversation that is consciously invented and attributed, because of truth to spirit, to actual personages? To be sure Plato was not troubled by Landor's abhorrence of using the historically recorded or remembered speeches of his characters.³

¹ This view is presented by A. E. Taylor in his *Plato* (New York), pp. 31-32: "If we would avoid serious errors, it is necessary always to remember that the personages of one of Plato's philosophical dialogues are one and all characters in a play. 'Protagoras' or 'Gorgias' in a Platonic dialogue, is not the historical Professor of that name, but a fictitious personage created by Plato as a representative of views and tendencies which he wishes to criticize. Mingled with traits drawn from the actual persons whose names these characters bear, we can often find in the picture others which can be known or suspected to belong to the writer's contemporaries. And the same is true, though the fact is commonly forgotten, of the protagonist of the drama, the Platonic 'Socrates.' 'Socrates' in Plato is neither, as some of the older and more uncritical expositors used to assume, the historical Socrates, nor, as is too often taken for granted today, the historical Plato, but the hero of the Platonic drama."

² John Burnet, in his *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1911), takes this attitude, especially toward the *Phaedo*: ". . . I cannot bring myself to believe that he (Plato) falsified the story of his master's last hours upon earth by using him as a mere mouthpiece for novel doctrines of his own. That would have been an offense against good taste and an outrage on all natural piety; for if Plato did this thing he must have done it deliberately. There can be no question here of unconscious development; he must have known quite well whether Socrates held these doctrines or not. I confess that I should regard the *Phaedo* as little better than a heartless mystification if half the things commonly believed about it were true" (Introduction, p. xii).

³ Merrill, *op. cit.*, p. 118. "He (Landor) said of this method (of imaginary conversations) that he never put in the mouths of this speakers any words they had

Plato employs not only real but often contemporary characters so that it is no more than reasonable to expect to find much that is not imagined in his dialogues, especially since the production of imaginary conversations, as such, had no part in his conscious purpose. Doubtless at first his intention was to be as exact in reproducing actual conversations as possible, but as his ideas became more clearly formulated and as he began to extend the application of Socrates' principles to realms of thought hitherto unexplored, instead of dropping the old method of Socratic conversation, he merely imagined what Socrates would have said upon these new subjects, could he have lived to think them out. Herein we have the very essence of the imaginary conversation. Finally, however, he had so far transgressed the bounds of Socratic reasoning that the device of putting his own words into the mouth of Socrates became an unnatural one; consequently, in the later dialogues Socrates is little more than a name, or at the most an idealization. A division upon this basis seems the one best suited to the study of the Platonic dialogues as imaginary conversations, and is in no way inconsistent with the philosophical divisions of Schleiermacher and other scholars.

Having discussed the dialogues in general as to purpose and classification, it now remains to examine them more specifically with regard to their dramatic value.¹ When reading Plato's dialogues as imaginary conversations, the feature that attracts

actually spoken—only such as they might have spoken. Furthermore, he avoided placing them in the situations in which they had actually figured in life. He chose rather to live into their personalities until he could know what they would say and do under any imagined circumstances, and then to represent them in such new situations. His aim was, then, to attain psychological rather than historical accuracy. Moreover, he tried to represent his speakers, not in the one light in which they are wont to be seen as historical personages, but also as complex human beings."

¹ A systematic analysis of the dramatic qualities of each individual dialogue would be of value at this point, but it is omitted partly because of lack of space and partly because Hirzel's discussions and Jowett's analyses are so complete as to include even some treatment of the dramatic phase of the dialogues. The latter's comparisons of the various dialogue devices employed by Plato, his ideas regarding the relation of history and fiction in the Platonic dialogues, and his manner of tracing the blend of philosophic and dramatic inspiration, could scarcely be improved upon. The purpose of the following brief and admittedly inadequate discussion is merely to emphasize and illustrate a few of the most salient traits in the dramatic work of Plato.

one's attention most forcibly is the way in which the prevailing spirit of a dialogue suits its subject-matter, the way in which Plato has put real art into his philosophical writings. A distinctive note is given to each dialogue—the pervading sense of youth and beauty in *Lysis*, the simplicity and poetic style of *Charmides*, the vigor and marked dramatic force of *Laches*, the clever argumentative spirit of *Protagoras*, the serene spiritual beauty of *Phaedo* combined with a sense of impending tragedy, the ironical mirth of *Euthydemus*, the dignified mature thoughtfulness of *Phaedrus*—so one might continue throughout the list, for in almost every dialogue the dramatic genius of Plato has created a definite mood which breathes life into the speakers and gives sound and expression to their words.

In spite of the profound philosophical thought underlying the conversations, Plato generally makes them sound natural and characteristic of the speakers. With indefatigable patience he reproduces the almost endless Socratic questionings by which the great master was wont to lead the ignorant into the mazes of metaphysics. Perhaps the best example of this type of conversation is the lengthy interchange of brief leading questions and monosyllabic answers by Socrates and a slave boy in *Meno*, whereby the latter is brought to an understanding of geometrical figures. Since this passage is far too long to quote, I have selected a group of speeches from *Charmides* which, in spite of its being indirect dialogue, will illustrate this same method in a comparatively short space, considering that length is one of the leading characteristics of this type of conversation:

Socrates has asked the youth to define temperance.—At first he hesitated, and was very unwilling to answer: then he said that he thought temperance was doing things orderly and quietly, such things for instance as walking in the streets, and talking, or anything else of that nature. "In a word," he said, "I should answer that in my opinion, temperance is quietness."

"Are you right, Charmides?" I said. "No doubt the opinion is held that the quiet are the temperate; but let us see whether they are right who say this; and first tell me whether you would not acknowledge temperance to be of the class of the honorable and good?"

"Yes."

"But which is best when you are at the writing-master's, to write the same letters quickly or quietly?"

"Quickly."

"And to read quickly or slowly?"

"Quickly again."

"And in playing the lyre, or wrestling, quickness or cleverness are far better than quietness and slowness?"

"Yes."

"And the same holds in boxing and the pancratium?"

"Certainly."

"And in leaping and running, and in bodily exercises generally, quickness and agility are good; slowness and inactivity and quietness are bad?"

"That is evident."

"Then," I said, "in all bodily actions, not quietness, but the greatest agility and quickness, is the noblest and best?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And is temperance a good?"

"Yes."

"Then, in reference to the body, not quietness, but quickness will be the higher degree of temperance, if temperance is a good?"

"True," he said.

"And which," I said, "is better—facility in learning or difficulty in learning?"

"Facility."

"Yes," I said, "and facility in learning is learning quickly, and difficulty in learning is learning quietly and slowly?"

"True."

"And is it not better to teach one another quickly and energetically, rather than quietly and slowly?"

"Yes."

"And is not shrewdness a quickness or cleverness of the soul, and not a quietness?"

"True."

"And is it not best to understand what is said, whether at the writing-master's or the music-master's, or anywhere else, not as quietly as possible, but as quickly as possible?"

"Yes."

"And when the soul inquires, and in deliberations, not the quietest as I imagine, and he who with difficulty deliberates and discovers, is thought worthy of praise, but he who does this most easily and quickly?"

"That is true," he said.

"And in all that concerns either body or soul, swiftness and activity are clearly better than slowness and quietness?"

"That," he said, "is the inference."

"Then temperance is not quietness, nor is the temperate life quiet, upon this view; for the life which is temperate is supposed to be the good. And of

two things, one is true,—either never or very seldom do the quiet actions of life appear to be better than the quick and energetic ones: still, even if we admit this, temperance will not be acting quietly any more than acting quickly and vehemently, either in walking, talking, or anything else; nor will the quiet life be more temperate than the unquiet, seeing that temperance is reckoned by us in the class of good and honorable, and the quick have been shown to be as good as the quiet.”

“I think,” he said, “Socrates, that you are right in saying that.”¹

In a passage such as this, Plato has shown us not only Socrates’ method but the man himself—at least in one aspect of his many-sided nature—the searching, thorough, but very queer, instructor of youth. The following realistic bit of conversation from the *Protagoras* shows Socrates in a different mood and illustrates Plato’s skill in contracting characters. The amiable but ostentatious and prolix Protagoras is the very antithesis of terse ironical Socrates.

Socrates speaks: “Protagoras, I have a wretched memory, and when anyone makes a long speech to me I never remember what he is talking about. As then, if I have been deaf, and you were going to converse with me, you would have had to raise your voice; so now, having such a bad memory, I will ask you to cut your answers short, if you would take me with you.”

“What do you mean?” he said. “How am I to shorten my answers? Shall I make them too short?”

“Certainly not,” I said.

“But short enough?” he said.

“Yes,” I said.

“Shall I answer what appears to me to be short enough, or what appears to you to be short enough?”

“I have heard,” I said, “that you can speak and teach others to speak about the same things at such length that words never seemed to fail, or with such brevity that no one could use fewer of them. Please therefore, if you talk with me, to adopt the latter or more compendious method.”

“Socrates,” he replied, “many a battle of words have I fought, and if I had followed the method of disputation which my adversaries desired, as you want me to do, I should have been no better than another, and the name of Protagoras would have been nowhere.”²

A fine example of dramatic force combined with the utmost simplicity is offered by *Crito*, in which Socrates’ aged friend visits

¹ *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett (Edition de Luxe), IV, 15.

² Jowett, *op. cit.*, IV, 170.

him in prison. The beginning is dramatic by reason of its very quietness and naturalness:

Socrates: Why have you come at this hour, Crito? It must be quite early?

Crito: Yes, certainly.

Socrates: What is the exact time?

Crito: The dawn is breaking.

Soc.: I wonder that the keeper of the prison would let you in.

Cr.: He knows me because I often come, Socrates; moreover, I have done him a kindness.

Soc.: And are you only just come?

Cr.: No, I came some time ago.

Soc.: Then why did you sit and say nothing, instead of awakening me at once?

Cr.: Why, indeed, Socrates, I myself would rather not have all this sleeplessness and sorrow. But I have been wondering at your peaceful slumbers, and that was the reason why I did not awaken you, because I wanted you to be out of pain. I have always thought you happy in the calmness of your temperament; but never did I see the like of the easy, cheerful way in which you bear this calamity.

Soc.: Why, Crito, when a man has reached my age he ought not to be repining at the prospect of death.¹

Socrates is not the only character who is made real to us in Plato's dialogues. In a few brief speeches a minor character is often revealed with surprising distinctness. How clearly the following passage makes manifest the sophistic egoism of Euthyphro!

Socrates: Good heavens, Euthyphro! and have you such a precise knowledge of piety and impiety, and of divine things in general, that, supposing the circumstances to be as you state, you are not afraid that you may be doing an impious thing in bringing an action against your father?

Euthyphro: The best of Euthyphro, and that which distinguishes him, Socrates, from other men, is his exact knowledge of all these matters. What should I be good for without that?

Socrates: Rare friend! I think that I cannot do better than be your disciple, before the trial with Meletus comes on.²

The characteristic tone of the Greek rhapsody is caught to perfection in these speeches from *Ion*:

Socrates has just suggested to Ion that he praises Homer not by art but by divine inspiration.

¹ Jowett, III, 137.

² *Ibid.*, III, 59.

Ion: That is good, Socrates; and yet I doubt whether you will have eloquence to persuade me that I praise Homer only when I am mad and possessed, and if you could hear me speak I am sure that you would never think that.

Soc.: I should like very much to hear you read, but not until you have answered a question which I have to ask. On what part of Homer do you speak well?—not surely about every part?

Ion: There is no part, Socrates, about which I do not speak well, of that I can assure you.

Soc.: Surely not about things in Homer of which you have no knowledge?

Ion: And what is there of which Homer speaks of which I have no knowledge?¹

As one reads a dialogue of Plato, one's mind often wanders far from the printed page; indeed, this happens so frequently that there is created a feeling of difficulty in concentrating the attention on the dialogues, which inclines one to criticize Plato for inability to retain his readers' thoughts, until suddenly it dawns upon one with startling illumination that in this very characteristic lies Plato's greatest art. The remarkable power of provoking individual thought is the element of the Platonic dialogues in which they excel all other imaginary conversations.² The contrasting of characters also is a notable feature of the work. In most cases the contrast is made between Socrates and those with whom he speaks. This device is used to excellent advantage when the clear-thinking ironical Socrates converses with men representative

¹ Jowett, IV, 277.

² All critics, I find, do not agree with me in giving so favorable an interpretation to the mind-wandering tendency induced by reading Plato. Among these is Mahaffy, who declares it to be an undoubted fact "that this great author is far more talked about and lauded to the skies, than honestly read, and that even diligent scholars find it a task to read a dialogue of Plato honestly through. Very often the questions and answers are minute and trivial, containing no further interest than the persistent assertion of the importance of the search after truths as such. Often, again, the points made by Socrates are sophistical and unsound, and we feel annoyed that Plato will not let the respondent give him the true and embarrassing reply. . . . Even all the literary skill and nameless charm of Plato's style cannot conceal from us the fact that his dialogues are tedious in the minuteness and elaboration of their conversations. This will be admitted by any candid reader of Plato who does not belong to the scholastic trade-union which thinks that all great Greeks are to be lauded as perfect, and that even the mildest detraction is to be set down as want of taste, or want of real appreciation or of sympathy for the classics. Verily the merits of such an author as Plato do not need to be supported by a suppression of his weaker points." Jowett, however, says nothing to contradict my statement; he remarks that "the dialogues themselves manifest beyond possibility of mistake the design of compelling the reader, by their peculiar form, to the independent origination of thoughts" (I, lv).

of distinct types, such as the easily cornered Protagoras, the conceited enthusiastic Ion, or ingenuous youths like Charmides, Lysis, or Menexenus. It is one of the marks of his genius that every character in the dialogues is a distinct personality, no two having precisely the same attitude or type of mind.¹ Nor has Plato failed to give us, in the dialogues taken as a whole, a vivid impression of the many-sided Greek life of his own day and of an earlier day as well. So imperceptibly is this impression fostered that the reader is often quite unconscious of its influence.²

It is difficult to summarize, in a sentence or two, Plato's contribution to the development of the imaginary conversation, for, as Hirzel suggests,³ in the range of his dialogues—from the highly realistic conversations whose aim is the lifting of the Silenus mask from Socrates' personality, to the profound discussions in which the dramatic form is crushed under the burden of the thoughts—we can find this literary form used for every possible purpose. Plato was blessed with not only profound intellectual development but also artistic gifts of a high order, a combination that is essential to the realization of all the possibilities of the imaginary conversation. Had Plato extended the scope of his character delineations as widely as did Landor, that is, had he gone outside the Socratic circle, and had he placed the dramatic interest foremost rather than making it secondary to the philosophic, undoubtedly, because of his superior genius, he would have far excelled Landor. As it is, however, we must accord to Landor a higher place as a writer of imaginary conversations; hundreds of men and women talk to us from his pages, as opposed to the score or more whom Plato causes to speak.

¹ Jowett, *op. cit.*, I, 18.

² Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxii-xxxiv. "We must note certain positive features which show that Plato was not only a realist in his character-drawing but also had a strong sense of historical perspective and a genuine feeling for historical values.—Like the great dramatist he was, Plato has transported himself back to the age of Pericles and the age of Alcibiades, and portrayed them as they seemed to the men who lived in them, not as they must have appeared to his contemporaries and to himself, when the glamour of the great time had passed away. . . . It seems to me that the reason why Plato's power of transporting himself back to an earlier time has been met with such scant recognition is just the success with which he has done it. As we read him, we hardly realize that he is calling up a time which was passing away when he himself was a boy."

³ Hirzel, *op. cit.*, I, 175.